

SENATE RECORD VOTE ANALYSIS

105th Congress
1st Session

Vote No. 172

July 11, 1997, 10:26 am
Page S-7234 Temp. Record

DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION/Cancel 1 of 3 Fighter Programs

SUBJECT: National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 1998 . . . S. 936. Feingold amendment No. 677.

ACTION: AMENDMENT REJECTED, 19-79

SYNOPSIS: As reported, S. 936, the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 1998, will authorize a total of \$268.2 billion in budget authority for national defense programs (the President requested \$265.6 billion). In real terms, this bill will authorize \$3.3 billion less than was provided in fiscal year (FY) 1997.

The Feingold amendment would require the Defense Department to prepare a report stating which of the three new tactical fighter aircraft programs it would recommend terminating if only two of those programs were to be funded. The report would also be required to contain an analysis that would conclude that the two remaining tactical fighter programs, together with the current tactical fighter aircraft assets of the Armed Forces, would provide the Armed Forces with an effective, affordable, tactical fighter force structure that was capable of meeting projected threats well into the twenty-first century. (The three new tactical fighter programs are the F/A-18 E/F aircraft program (Navy), the F-22 aircraft program (Air Force), and the Joint Strike Fighter aircraft program (multi-service).)

Those favoring the amendment contended:

The Defense Department is currently planning on purchasing some 4,400 new fighters from the three new tactical fighter programs at a total cost, according to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), of at least \$350 billion. The CBO and the General Accounting Office (GAO) have concluded that this planned acquisition, given current fiscal constraints, is unrealistic. The funds just will not be there. The Defense Department realizes it has to cut back. In the recently released Quadrennial Defense Review, a collaborative effort by the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the individual services to reassess our strategic blueprints for our Armed Forces, sharp reductions were recommended in the F/A-18 E/F and F-22 programs. However, cutting back on programs will

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YEAS (19)		NAYS (79)		NOT VOTING (2)	
Republicans (1 or 2%)	Democrats (18 or 42%)	Republicans (54 or 98%)	Democrats (25 or 58%)	Republicans (0)	Democrats (2)
Grassley	Boxer Bryan Bumpers Byrd Durbin Feingold Harkin Johnson Kerrey Kohl Lautenberg Leahy Moseley-Braun Reid Rockefeller Torricelli Wellstone Wyden	Abraham Allard Ashcroft Bennett Bond Brownback Burns Campbell Chafee Coats Cochran Collins Coverdell Craig D'Amato DeWine Domenici Enzi Faircloth Frist Gorton Gramm Grams Gregg Hagel Hatch Helms	Hutchinson Hutchison Inhofe Jeffords Kempthorne Kyl Lott Lugar Mack McCain McConnell Murkowski Nickles Roberts Roth Santorum Sessions Shelby Smith, Bob Smith, Gordon Snowe Specter Stevens Thomas Thompson Thurmond Warner	Akaka Baucus Biden Bingaman Breaux Cleland Conrad Daschle Dodd Dorgan Feinstein Ford Glenn Graham Hollings Inouye Kennedy Kerry Levin Lieberman Moynihan Murray Reed Robb Sarbanes	Landrieu- ² Mikulski- ²
EXPLANATION OF ABSENCE: 1—Official Business 2—Necessarily Absent 3—Illness 4—Other					
SYMBOLS: AY—Announced Yea AN—Announced Nay PY—Paired Yea PN—Paired Nay					

not solve the problem. Buying fewer of each of those types of aircraft, as suggested, would make each of the planes purchased more expensive because economies of scale would be lost. Research and development and testing costs are the same whether 1 plane or 1,000 are purchased, and the cost of creating a construction line is likewise the same. The Air Force's own numbers for F-22 purchases prove the point--last year, it asked to buy 124 F-22's over 5 years at a cost of \$21.5 billion. This year, it scaled back its request by 40 percent, to 70 planes, at a cost of \$20.4 billion. Thus, to save 5 percent in funding, it had to give up 40 percent of the planes to be purchased. Over the years, we have frequently seen this type of inefficient funding cut proposed, and approved, as each branch of the Armed Services has fought to keep its particular programs. These turf wars have wasted tens of billions of dollars and have degraded military capabilities. With the static defense budget we know we are going to have in the next few years we cannot afford to waste money in this manner. To solve this problem, the Feingold amendment would order the Defense Department to make a decision on which of the three fighter programs it would get rid of if it had to get rid of one of them. The amendment would not make the choice--it would leave that choice up to the military experts. We know many of our colleagues are committed to retaining one or another of these three fighters; therefore, to avoid that controversy, this amendment would merely require a decision to be made. We urge our colleagues to support this amendment.

Those opposing the amendment contended:

Like our colleagues, we are very concerned that not enough will be provided in the defense procurement budget in the next few years to meet current military plans. Those plans need to be redrawn to prevent shortfalls and a disjointed force structure. Military planners need to look at how all parts of the budget fit together; they cannot just cut funding for some items in order to keep spending at the originally planned levels for others. This approach, though, is exactly the approach that is commanded by the Feingold amendment. The amendment would require the Defense Department, within 60 days, to recommend the termination of 1 of the 3 new fighter programs. One of those fighters is being developed to meet the Navy's particular needs; another is being developed to meet the Air Forces' particular needs; the third is largely being developed for the Marines. Our colleague is basically requiring the Defense Department to say which of those services is going to be left without modern fighters. The justification that is given for requiring this selection is that it would achieve economies of scale. Our colleagues are correct; having a smaller, balanced force structure in which the same items are purchased, though fewer of them are purchased, is more expensive. Following their course would be cheaper. If followed as a general rule, however, it would result in a Swiss-cheese defense. We are not ruling out the termination of any of these fighter programs; if military experts determine that it will be possible to meet our diverse defense needs without one of them, and if they recommend that course as the most cost-effective, we will support that decision. So far, they have not made that determination. The Secretary of Defense, based on the Quadrennial Defense Review, has recommended major reductions in the number of planes purchased for all three programs. The Defense Department believes that for military purposes it is better to continue all three programs at a reduced level. We remind our colleagues as well that Congress has created an independent group of military experts to assess the defense budget. That group, the National Defense Panel, will give Congress its recommendations on December 15. At a minimum, we think we should wait and see if the Defense Panel agrees with the approach recommended by the Defense Department, or if it instead agrees with the bean counters at the CBO and the GAO. The Feingold amendment would make a decision in haste that we know the Defense Department does not favor. We urge our colleagues to reject this amendment.